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SUBJECT: AFGHAN LEADERS TELL AMB. KHALILZAD THEY ARE
PESSIMISTIC ON SECURITY

Classified By: CDA Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. USUN Amb. Zalmay Khalilzad met with a broad array of Afghan political leaders, civil society activists, and government officials on the margins of his participation in a UN Security Council fact-finding mission to Afghanistan Nov. 24-27. He heard a common theme of growing pessimism on the state of security and ethnic relations. Afghan leaders told the ambassador that 2008 had been a rough year for progress in the country and that uncertainty over next year's presidential election added to the country's instability. Contacts not close to President Karzai expressed decreasing confidence in the ability of his administration to address the challenges facing the country. See paragraph 11 for Afghan officials with whom Ambassador Khalilzad met.

Karzai's Mostly Negative Outlook

¶2. (C/NF) President Karzai told Amb. Khalilzad over two private meetings and in a discussion with the UN Security Council ambassadors that there were several reasons to be concerned for Afghanistan. Karzai cited the country's chief challenges as: civilian casualties, problems with Pakistan, media reports that undermined the government (a reference to a New York Times article criticizing his brother), and "parallel" operations of certain PRTs, which he claimed undermined local governance by some coalition partners. He added that the security near Kabul had worsened to the point that security forces could not provide security more than one kilometer outside of greater Kabul. Khalilzad urged the president to better manage his dialogue with the international community both privately and publicly, specifically asking him to re-word his criticisms of foreign forces to emphasize better measures to protect civilians.

¶3. (C/NF) As for positive developments in Afghanistan, Karzai cited the country's growing economy and financial reserves, increased access to health care, growing numbers of young people attending college, and an improving relationship with Pakistan's political leadership. A recent phone call with President-Elect Obama had also gone well. Khalilzad assured Karzai the US commitment to Afghanistan would remain strong through the transition to a new US administration. He hoped additional US forces and a larger Afghan army would be able to support next year's presidential and provincial council elections.

United Front Insists on Earlier Election, But Still Has No Candidate

¶4. (C/NF) Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni and other members of the opposition United Front coalition hosted a dinner for Khalilzad. Khalilzad heard fierce criticisms of Karzai's administration. Qanooni and former president Burhanuddin Rabbani said the president's appointments and policies had driven wedges between Afghanistan's Pashtuns and other ethnic groups. United Front leaders criticized Karzai for not consulting Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks before pursuing reconciliation talks with insurgent groups and considering tribal militia plans.

¶5. (C/NF) Qanooni said next year's election must be held according to the timelines set forth in the Constitution, a position supported by Rabbani, former Defense Minister Marshall Fahim, First Vice President Ahmad Zia Massoud, and nearly all other opposition politicians. Shrugging off arguments that an earlier election would be difficult for voter education and security plans, Qanooni said the sooner an election were held, the sooner a new government could begin addressing the country's problems. Qanooni advocated a national or international conference, similar to the Bonn process, to bring the country's powerbrokers together to resolve differences and promote national unity. Qanooni also supported an interim administration taking over after the expiration of Karzai's term if an election is not held by then.

¶6. (C/NF) UF leaders told Amb. Khalilzad they had not yet identified a presidential candidate. Rabbani added that the coalition had not even decided whether to run one of its own or support a unity candidate. Qanooni said the coalition was inclined to wait to see how events played out, such as the

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debate over the election's timing and the nominations of individuals in the new US foreign policy team. He and Rabbani said the UF would not make its choice public for some weeks. Rabbani said the coalition, for now, was more focused on building a "national unity team" to counter perceived Pashtun bias in the Karzai administration. At the same dinner, Hazara leader Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq appeared to align with the UF, if not formally join its ranks. Mohaqeq said he used to support Karzai and his allies in Parliament in the interests of the country, but would no longer back the administration.

Vice Presidents Hope For More Development

¶7. (C/NF) Khalilzad met separately with Afghanistan's two vice presidents, Ahmad Zia Massoud and Karim Khalili, to discuss issues relevant to their portfolios. Massoud hoped the Afghan government would continue to address economic issues, including building agricultural, hydropower, and irrigation infrastructure. Khalili hoped for more development in his native Hazarajat, especially on road construction that linked Bamyan province with Kabul and Herat.

Cabinet Ministers Hope to Enact Changes in Time For Election

¶8. (C/NF) Amb. Khalilzad spoke with more than 10 Cabinet members during his visit. Most ministers focused on the worsening security situation and its impact on their respective portfolios. Minister of Energy and Water Ismail Khan said poor security threatened numerous projects, such as hydroelectric power-generating dams, from going online. Khan added more than 80 percent of Heratis now opposed Karzai's government because of its inability to provide security and services.

¶9. (C/NF) Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar, on the job for only four weeks, is focusing on village-level security, highway security, and addressing security threats to Kabul and surrounding areas. Atmar hoped to change a culture of

corruption within the MoI that saw police chiefs cash in on their positions with bribes and extortion schemes. Atmar hoped to continue and expand the Focused District Development police training program and develop an intelligence unit within the national police that could better tip off security forces to local insurgent groups.

Civil Society Leaders Say Situation Has Worsened in Last Year

¶10. (C/NF) Amb. Khalilzad hosted a roundtable with a dozen civil society leaders, where he asked for impressions on the situation in Afghanistan. Overwhelmingly, roundtable participants said security deteriorated in 2008. Most blamed Karzai's government, although many also criticized the Coalition's initial military strategies to fight the Taliban and the US's reluctance to challenge Pakistan's support for insurgent groups. Most doubted the West's ability to win a guerrilla war in Afghanistan. Ahmad Saidi added that endemic official corruption contributed to the public's declining confidence in Karzai. Fawzia Kofi, an MP and NGO founder, said UNAMA needed to do a better job of coordinating international aid. Gen. Baryalai Khan disapproved of the government's reconciliation strategy, saying the government should only negotiate with the Taliban once it is in a position of strength.

¶11. (C/NF) Afghan officials with whom Amb. Khalilzad met:

President Karzai
VP Ahmad Zia Massoud
VP Abdul Karim Khalili
Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni
Upper House Speaker Sibghatullah Mojaddadi
Professors Burhanuddin Rabbani and Marshall Fahim
MP Shakar Kargar
Pir Gailani and Upper House Deputy Speaker Hamid Gailani
MP Haji Mohaqeq
Energy Minister Ismail Khan
Interior Minister Hanif Atmar
Public Health Minister Fatima
Communications Minister Sangin
NDS chief Amrullah Saleh

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Kabul Governor Haji Din Mohammad
Nangarhar Governor Gul Aqa Sherzai
SRSG Kai Eide

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